



# Pandemic Influenza

Infection Control and  
Frequently Asked Questions

controlling the flu

NASA Headquarters  
Facilities and Administrative Services Division

[www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov)

# Infection Control

## Introduction

Pandemic influenza refers to a worldwide outbreak of influenza among people when a new strain of the virus emerges that has the ability to infect humans and to spread from person to person. During the early phases of an influenza pandemic, people might not have any natural immunity to the new strain, so the disease could spread rapidly among the population. A vaccine to protect people against illness from a pandemic influenza virus may not be widely available until many months after an influenza pandemic begins.

## Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of the H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu. Symptoms of H1N1 flu can vary in severity from mild to severe which include fever, body aches, sore throat, headaches, chills, coughing, and possibly diarrhea and vomiting. Similar to seasonal influenza, H1N1 flu can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure and can also worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

## Prevention Tips

There are everyday actions that may help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. However, it is important to emphasize that no single action will provide complete protection, but an approach combining the following steps can help decrease the likelihood of influenza virus transmission.

- Stay home if you are sick
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or with hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Cough or sneeze into your arm or a tissue
- Wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
- Avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with coworkers and customers
- Avoid shaking hands and always wash your hands after physical contact with others
- If wearing gloves, always wash your hands after removing them
- Keep frequently touched common surfaces (for example, telephones, computer equipment, etc.) clean
- Try not to use other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment



- Minimize group meetings; use e-mail, phones (teleconferences) and text messaging
- Limit unnecessary visitors to the workplace.

## **What To Do If You Develop Flu-Like Symptoms**

**At Home:** If you develop flu-like symptoms while at home, **YOU SHOULD NOT GO TO WORK.** Stay home and avoid contact with others as much as possible. Contact your health care provider and follow its instructions regarding influenza testing and/or treatment, and contact your supervisor for available leave options.

**At Work:** **DO NOT GO TO THE HEALTH UNIT.** You can call the Health Unit at ext. 2600. Clinic staff will conduct a telephone interview to determine the appropriate course of action. Employees who develop flu-like symptoms at work will be advised to go home and seek medical attention from their private health care professionals.

Employees with severe conditions may be evaluated in the clinic and will be required to:

- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Use a mask (provided by the Health Unit) during clinic visit
- Sit in a separate waiting room

# Infection Control

## Self Care During Illness

If influenza is confirmed by your health care provider, or if you develop signs and symptoms consistent with influenza that resolve without medical care, do not go to work or any populated areas. Contact your supervisor for leave and/or telework options. Stay home for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. Other self-care measures include:

- Check with your health care provider about any special care you might need if pregnant or if you have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema.
- Check with your health care provider about whether you should take antiviral medications.
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks) to keep from being dehydrated
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention immediately

## Emergency Warning Signs

In adults, emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough



## **Frequently Asked Questions About H1N1 Flu**

H1N1 flu (formerly referred to as “swine flu”) is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. This virus is spreading from person to person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a global pandemic of novel influenza A (H1N1) or swine flu was underway by raising the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6. Since the WHO declaration of a pandemic, the new H1N1 virus has continued to spread.

### **What is the difference between seasonal flu and pandemic flu?**

Seasonal (or common) flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

Pandemic flu refers to a worldwide outbreak of influenza among people when a new strain of the virus emerges that has the ability to infect humans and to spread from person to person. During the early phases of an influenza pandemic, people might not have any natural immunity to the new strain, so the disease could spread rapidly among the population.

### **What are the symptoms of H1N1 flu?**

The symptoms are nearly identical to seasonal flu—fever, sore throat, cough, muscle aches, and occasionally vomiting and diarrhea. Similar to seasonal flu, severe illnesses and death may occur as a result of illness associated with this virus.

### **How is the influenza virus transmitted?**

Flu viruses typically spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the influenza virus. Germs can also be spread touching inanimate objects that have the virus on them, such as door handles, telephones, etc., and then touching your mouth and nose.

# Pandemic Influenza

## Frequently Asked Questions

The H1N1 flu has an incubation period of 1–7 days; more commonly 1–4 days. A person is infectious anywhere from 1 day before to 7 days after symptoms start. The H1N1 flu is not spread by eating pork meat or products.

### **Are there treatments available if I get the flu?**

Yes, the virus is susceptible to two known commercially available antiviral drugs, Tamiflu and Relenza.

### **Is there a vaccine against the pandemic flu?**

Because the strain of the H1N1 flu is new, there is no vaccine available for distribution yet. However, the CDC expects that a vaccine will be available, initially in limited quantities, sometime in the fall of 2009. However, at this time there is no information on the distribution to and availability of the vaccine at the HQ Health Unit.

The seasonal flu vaccine does not appear to provide protection against this strain. However, everyone is being encouraged to get vaccinated against seasonal flu. The seasonal flu vaccine will be available in the HQ Health Unit on a “first come, first served” basis.



# Pandemic Influenza

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Will a mask protect me from getting the flu?

It is not clear. The effectiveness of face masks and N95 respirators for the control of H1N1 flu in community settings is very limited. The CDC has developed interim recommendations based on public health judgment and historical use of these personal protective devices in other settings, and a face mask or respirator is not currently being recommended for the general public. However, in certain circumstances, such as caring for a person with influenza-like illness or for persons at increased risk of severe illness from influenza, a face mask or N-95 respirator may be considered.

It is better to focus on measures that are known to be effective, such as:

- Frequent hand washing
- Covering coughs and sneezes (with a disposable tissue or sleeve when a tissue is unavailable)
- Avoiding unnecessary social contact and crowded settings
- Avoiding close contact (maintaining a distance of 6 feet) with persons with influenza-like illness.
- Staying home if ill, seeking medical attention, and minimizing contact with others



### How can I prepare myself and my family for a potential pandemic?

- Educate yourself and stay informed
- Practice good hygiene—wash your hands regularly
- Limit close contact with others—avoid large gatherings when possible
- Create a Family Disaster Plan—make plans on what you could or could not do if children were at home because authorities decided to close schools and child-care facilities

**Please visit the NASA Headquarters Pandemic Influenza page at <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/flu>.**